



## Program Overview

USAID supports Colombian efforts to transition out of conflict towards durable peace. Colombia is not a typical aid recipient and USAID's commitment stems from the instability and strife associated with the country's 50-year civil conflict. Colombia's status as a steadily growing middle-income country masks severe inequities. In reality, there are two Colombias: a dynamic and sophisticated Colombia in a half-dozen urban centers, such as Bogota and Medellin, which coexists with a poor, conflictive and neglected rural Colombia.

The transition towards peace demands that Colombia address this duality as it lies at the center of the conflict and fuels an illicit rural economy of drug trafficking, extortion, illegal mining, and other maladies. The Government of Colombia (GOC) recognizes this and is actively working to redress the historic neglect of rural Colombia by increasing citizen security; bringing GOC institutions, basic public services, and infrastructure to these regions; increasing public and private investment in these areas; and promoting reconciliation among the conflict's victims and perpetrators. While financial contributions of bilateral and multilateral donors amount to less than one-third of one percent of GDP, Colombia looks to USAID – the country's largest bilateral donor - to help strengthen its capacity to address development challenges. Thus, from 2014-2018 USAID will continue to be an important partner in Colombia with four overall objectives:

### Objective I: Increase Presence of Democratic Institutions in Targeted Areas

The absence of effective state institutions in many parts of Colombian territory fuel the conflict. Strengthening the presence and performance of national and sub-national institutions in far-flung rural areas is essential to fill the space currently occupied by illegal armed groups and for the effective implementation of any eventual peace agreement. Weak GOC institutions have been unable to effectively and consistently guarantee the democratic rights of citizens, administer justice impartially and transparently, invest public resources effectively and expeditiously, and deliver services prioritized by citizens. USAID therefore focuses on supporting Colombian efforts to increase institutional presence, foster a culture of respect for human rights, promote access to justice, increase public investment, and provide services to historically underserved and conflictive rural areas where illicit activity often goes unchecked.



*Justice House in Tumaco, (Colombian Pacific Coast)  
Photo: USAID/Colombia*

One of the most basic functions of any state is to protect the rights of citizens and ensure access to justice. In Colombia's recent past, human rights violations (massacres, assassinations, kidnappings and threats) have occurred with impunity, especially in rural areas. Colombia has improved human rights trends over the course

of the past 10 years but there is still more to be done. For this reason, USAID promotes a culture of respect for human rights that helps to: prevent violations (e.g. via support for the National Ombudsman’s Early Warning System), protect those under threat (e.g. Ministry of Interior’s National Protection Unit), investigate when abuses occur (e.g. Attorney General’s Office), strengthen the ability of citizens to submit complaints (e.g. Ombudsman’s Office), and defend the rights of minority groups. In addition, USAID supports GOC initiatives that expand access to justice by promoting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and justice houses (e.g. Ministry of Justice and targeted municipalities), and legal and other services for sexual violence victims.

Helping Colombia to ensure that government services reach citizens, especially marginalized populations in historically neglected areas, is a major challenge. To this end, USAID supports efforts to restructure public investment towards traditionally marginalized areas. USAID has worked with Colombian officials to develop groundbreaking policies and programs that build state presence in areas recently stabilized by Colombia’s security forces. For example, USAID is helping the GOC implement a new, multi-billion dollar royalties system that re-directs revenues generated by income from the country’s natural resource wealth to underserved areas. USAID is also supporting greater collaboration between national, departmental and municipal governments to catalyze billions of dollars of investments for strategic projects in conflictive areas. In carrying out this work, USAID brings together local civil society organizations, traditional authorities, public officials and the private sector to strengthen the ability of local governments to better respond to citizen priorities for services. Moreover, USAID helps national and local authorities, as well as civil society organizations, set up transparent systems to reduce corruption.

## **Objective 2: Promote Reconciliation for Victims, Ex-Combatants and Citizens**

Fifty years of conflict and violence have created a tragic legacy of nearly six million victims, including over four million Colombians displaced from their communities and land. A critical step towards reconciliation was achieved in 2011 with the passage of Colombia’s Victims and Land Restitution Law. This landmark legislation addresses the needs of conflict victims through comprehensive reparations, land restitution, truth telling, and psycho-social support. USAID supports this transformative process by helping build the capacity of the GOC’s new Victims Unit and key entities charged with delivering services, reparations, and transitional justice to victims as mandated by Colombian law. As experiences in other post-conflict nations have demonstrated, “truth-telling” is

a critical piece of the reconciliation process that offers victims a sense of closure and raises societal awareness of the pain of the conflict, helping ensure that history does not repeat itself. USAID is supporting the Center of Historical Memory (established under the Victims Law) to document the tragedies of the past and conduct outreach to strengthen broad societal commitment to ensuring Colombia does not return to a state of systematic violence.

USAID is committed to working with ethnic communities, who represent up to one quarter of Colombia’s population and have disproportionately suffered the effects of conflict. USAID assists national-level public institutions (Presidential Programs for Afro-Colombians and Indigenous Affairs), as well as regional and local institutions to design and execute public policies addressing the needs of Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, as well as support to community-based ethnic organizations and traditional authorities to strengthen their capacity to interact with the public sector. Additionally, and in order to respond to the high levels of unemployment faced by urban ethnic minorities, USAID has entered into partnerships with private



Photo: USAID/Colombia

sector companies, local governments and community-based organizations to provide job placement opportunities expected to benefit 10,000 Afro-Colombian and indigenous youth. USAID also promotes the reintegration of ex-combatants back into society, as well as the rehabilitation of former child soldiers. USAID assists the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) to provide reintegration services to about 26,000 former fighters. This support will become that much more important should 8,000-30,000 FARC combatants and their supporters demobilize under a possible agreement to end the conflict.

USAID support to the Institute for Family Welfare (ICBF) is key to rehabilitating child soldiers, a significant challenge for Colombia as it seeks to transition out of conflict. The ICBF has assisted over 5,000 former child soldiers to date and the demands for such assistance are likely to increase markedly in the event of a GOC-FARC agreement to end the conflict. Experts estimate that perhaps 30% or more of combatants are under the age of 18. These children are considered victims of the conflict and require special attention to successfully return to society. With both ACR and ICBF, USAID assistance has been key to developing and operating a comprehensive suite of services (from psycho-social services to job training and personal protection) as former rebels undertake the arduous process of rejoining society. USAID efforts aim to reduce the likelihood that demobilized combatants will join criminal gangs or engage in illicit activities.

### **Objective 3: Improve Conditions for Inclusive Rural Economic Growth**

The transition towards a sustainable and inclusive peace will demand that Colombia address long standing socio-economic inequities. Improving rural security conditions is not enough; rural residents must see an economic future in the licit economy. Although Colombia's GDP has grown at 4.4% over the last five years and the middle class has expanded from 15% of the population in 2002 to over 28% in 2011, rural areas, especially those devastated by conflict, have not shared in this prosperity. Similarly, while the national poverty rate in Colombia fell from 45% to 33% between 2005 and 2012, nearly half of rural households still live in poverty. Fostering livelihoods by encouraging a diversified rural economy is a long-term and challenging endeavor, one that will take at least a generation and extraordinary GOC and private sector commitment. Over the short-term (i.e. five years) USAID has committed to helping the GOC create the pre-conditions for a vibrant rural economy with actions in three areas.



Photo: Karl Grobl

First, USAID will help the Ministry of Agriculture and other key institutions to return land to its rightful owners (e.g. Land Restitution Unit) and speed the granting of land titles, including collective titles of indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities. USAID's assistance is helping modernize the cadaster system, permitting the GOC to maintain accurate land ownership and titling information, a key prerequisite to guaranteeing citizen's property rights. Second, USAID is helping spur greater public and private investment in the rural sector. For example, USAID is helping strengthen local governments' capacity to compete for and then manage Colombian public funds available for productive infrastructure projects, including roads. Often the problem is not lack of national funding, but the inability of local governments to put forward effective infrastructure proposals and transparently and efficiently administer funds. USAID is also engaged in a major effort to help increase private sector investment in target rural municipalities, with a wide range of partnerships pairing small producers and ethnic communities with private firms to access higher paying markets for competitive agricultural products. Lastly, USAID is working to ensure that producer associations,

a lynchpin of the rural economy, are better able to provide services and benefits to their members (mainly small farmers). For example, the coffee, cacao and rubber producers associations USAID supports provide a platform for producers to find markets and negotiate with large buyers. As these producer associations grow, they are also increasingly able to provide extension services to members, helping farmers escape poverty and the trap of drug crop production. USAID efforts help build the capacity and sustainability of such associations.

#### **Objective 4: Strengthen Environmental Resiliency and Low-emissions Development**

Sustainable environmental management is critical to protecting Colombia's economic future. Colombia is one of the most bio-diverse countries in the world, and its natural systems provide water and energy that contribute to economic productivity. For example, 30% of Colombia's water comes from the country's fragile paramo ecosystem. In addition, approximately 40% of Colombia's territory is covered with natural forest, giving the country tremendous capacity to store carbon and capture significant development investment from the nascent carbon market. USAID activities focus on improving natural resource management, including forest and watershed management, to reduce threats to biodiversity. USAID efforts strengthen the capacity of GOC institutions to protect biodiversity, foster stakeholder participation in community-based conservation, and introduce best environmental practices, especially for mining, fisheries, and other productive systems.



Photo: USAID/Colombia

It is no coincidence that the failure of the Colombian state to control vast swaths of resource-rich Amazonian forest, inter-Andean valleys, and Pacific lowlands has been a driver of conflict. Without the state engaged in sound environmental management, the door is left open for illegal armed groups to exert control in these areas, the majority of which are located in Afro-Colombian and indigenous territories. Improved GOC capacity to administer these biodiversity-rich areas will help ensure that Colombia's natural resources will not be used for illicit purposes (e.g. revenue from illegal gold mining revenues captured by illegal actors).

Colombia's economic future also hinges on reducing vulnerability to changing climate patterns. An example was the 2010-2011 flooding in the Magdalena watershed which displaced approximately two million people and caused \$2.6 billion in damage. Climate change is both a humanitarian issue and a threat to long-term growth. USAID assists Colombia to reduce poverty while protecting the environment. For example, USAID supports GOC efforts to create incentives for firms and public sector entities to reduce their overall level of carbon emissions, while contributing to improved local livelihoods. USAID also helps build resilience to anticipated climate change impacts by diversifying local economies and improving management of water supplies.